

ADMIRAL STANSFIELD TURNER
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Q&A's American Society of Newspaper Editors

- Q. Do you think it is proper for the CIA to recruit journalists as agents? A practice which many of us see as directly counter to the spirit of the First Amendment.
- A. We fully share recognition that journalism, religion and academia bear a special importance for our country in preserving the independence and the perception of the independence of these particular professions. At the same time we recognize there may be unusual circumstances which an individual, who is also a member of one of those professions, may be uniquely placed to serve his country in a very difficult circumstance. Therefore, we have established a firm rule that there will be no covert use of people from those professions without a specific exception by the Director of Central Intelligence, myself. In short, we have taken very firm steps to preserve the separation between your profession and these others and ourselves, and yet we have let the country and you the opportunity when it is vitally important to this nation to use your profession and those others.
- Q. Admiral Turner I would like ask a follow-up to that. Let's move from the process of co-opting our people to co-opting our process. Would you give us a pledge here today to refrain from using newsgathering as a cover for your intelligence operations?
- A. I'll give you the same pledge on that as I just gave. That is only a very exceptional situation. What if we have a terrorist event in some foreign country and maybe the only way into that terrorist organization is for us to pose as a news person. Or, maybe the only way in is to use a stringer of some American news agency who happens to be a native of that country and related to somebody in the terroritory. Those are the kind of circumstances in which we would make exceptions.
- Q. Of course, Admiral that is really not very practical since most of us are suspect overseas anyway as the result of past activities by the agents. Let me move to the new, today's New York Times, intelligence disclosure that says that Iraq is now permitting the Iranian exiles within its borders to form military groups committed to overthrowing the Khoemeni government, in Iran. I wonder is there anything in the present restrictions on the Agency that has permitted the Agency or entered it in the support of the formation of these groups or in perhaps supplying them with arms?
- A. What you are talking about is covert action, because providing arms, supporting dissident groups, whatever it may be, is not an intelligence gathering function it is a covert action, which we define as an effort to influence events in a foreign country without the source of that influence becoming known. So, if you were involved in something like that it would be a covert action and we would be hampered in the directions today by the extensive notification we have to make on Capitol Hill up to 200 people.

Q. Are you participating in any activity?

A. I never comment on operational activities. You are the ones who originate the technique. If I say no, when we are not doing it, then when I have another question and it is something I cannot afford to disclose but we are doing it, the only way I could get out of that one is to lie and I won't do that. I would never comment on an operational.

Q. What is the Agency's best estimate as to the effects of increased U.S. pressure on Iran? Will it bring the release of the hostages, or will it bring a Moscow oriented Marxist party into power in Teheran?

A. You're dealing in Iran with presently three and shortly four separate power centers -- Khomeini, the President, the militants in the compound and, in due course, the , which is halfway elected. To answer your question, you would have to predict how these four were going to interplay and react as a result of the increased pressures that the President announced the other day. I find that it is very difficult to find any reason that the most powerful of those groups, Khomeini, will exceed the pressure. The man has a history of not conceding, not compromising, and yet, patience and negotiation.....pressures. Whether how soon they will succeed is very much a factor of the internal political dynamics of that country. And I wish I could predict that for you more surely, but it is a country in near chaos economically and politically, and it is almost impossible to make a prognostication of that sort.

Q. How much progress do you feel the Soviets have made in provoking a revolt by the Baluchis against the Iranian and Pakistani governments? Is there a real threat there that they are likely to move down and try to seal off the Strait of Hormuz?

A. Certainly there is a real threat latent there. If you'll look at the topography of Afghanistan, it is the south and southwest portions of it, adjacent to Baluchistan and both Iran and Pakistan, that is the easiest terrain--that which can be best accommodated by armored forces--that from which the Soviets can best establish control in Afghanistan and, hence, a base for nefarious activities in Baluchistan. So it is a latent problem. At this point, I believe the Soviets are having sufficient difficulties in gaining control of Afghanistan that that's got to be second on their agenda.

Q. Can you give us your best judgment on whether the Soviet Union is violating the treaty of any production or stockpiling of bacteriological weapons?

A. My job as an intelligence official is to report the facts of what the Soviets are doing as I can best discern them under all treaties.

Interpreting whether that complies with a treaty or not is the policy-makers' province, and I don't mean to split hairs, but if I get to passing that kind of a judgment, then I can be accused of slanting the reporting in favor of whatever my opinion is on the compliance or non-compliance with the treaty, or maybe withholding information because it does one thing or another to my previously stated opinion on this. So, with SALT, I don't make those judgments.

Q. What can you tell us about the reported outbreak of anthrax in the Soviet city of Sverdlovsk? Was this a pulmonary form of anthrax? Does this preclude explanations other than a bacteriological agent? Is there an installation in the area that your Agency believes to be a bacteriological weapons facility?

A. There is a bacteriological research facility there. There clearly was an epidemic in that city. We cannot say that it was from bacteriological materials that were intended for weapons. There is a reasonable probability that (inaudible) go to court.

Q. Have the Soviets constructed new and additional bacteriological weapons or facilities since the conclusion of this treaty?

A. I can't respond to that one in the public forum.

Q. The Sverdlovsk incident occurred in April of 1979. The reports were to be published in Europe as early as last October. When was the US Government....episode and were protests (inaudible).

A. Again, you're out of my sphere.

Q. Did you learn of the episode before October?

A. Again, you're off the list.

Q. The Huddleston Bill, which is the legislative proposal that was intended to create the CIA charters, proposed to exempt the CIA from the provisions of the Freedom of Information Act. I understood you to say in your remarks that you substantially support that. Many of us were elated last year when Deputy Director Carlucci testified that the Agency could function with all the protection it needed under the present Freedom of Information Act. Did something change since he testified or do you simply have disagreements with him about that?

A. Frank Carlucci's the strongest advocate I know of in the government for limited relief from the Freedom of Information Act. I can't

understand what you are referring to because I can't believe he ever said he didn't need relief from it because he has been carrying that torch public for a long time now.

Q. Well, I think that you're saying that you both agree that you need relief from the Freedom of Information Act.

A. Absolutely.

Q. Is there any material that has been released under the present statutes to the Soviet Ambassador or to newsmen that actually divulge national security secrets that jeopardize the security of the country?

A. Yes. But, only because of administrative errors on our part.

Q. So under the Act, you do have the right to censor out sensitive matters.

A. We do.

Q. Why then do you need relief from the Freedom of Information Act if you are the ultimate censor at present?

A. I explained that in my comments. Because there is a perception on the part of foreign agents and liaison services that we may not be able to hold the line under the Freedom of Information Act. Thus far, we have not lost a case in the court when we have claimed something was classified and, therefore, could not be released, and there was a suit to that effect, but if you are going to stick your neck, your life on the line for us, you want to count on our being able to win every court case of that sort in the future with an unpredictable series of judges and legal procedures in this country--of course you would not. You would not ask your sources to provide information to you under circumstances like that. It is ridiculous to think that I can recruit sources for much more delicate, risky operations than you ask your sources to undertake under these circumstances.

Q. I don't want to belabor the point, Admiral, but if the sources understand that the Agency has the right to censor and delete any information that is of a sensitive nature...

A. We don't have that right. We are subject to the courts of the United States if we are challenged by you or anyone else. We don't have that absolute right and I cannot, therefore, look

you in the eye and say, "I guarantee you that I will never disclose your name in public."

- Q. Well, let me just follow it up just one step beyond that. It's your feeling that questions of that sort should not be submitted to in camera judicial review--that that is dangerous?
- A. For purposes of brevity, I left out of my remarks a fourth relief that we hope will be enacted. It's one that the Attorney General has sponsored but we're very supportive of it. And that is to establish a law which permits in camera handling of classified information in our courts. Because, we are subject today to what's known as graymail. And this would be a great help there. It still would not completely serve the purpose that we need in relief from the Freedom of Information Act, because you're talking now about trying to persuade people with different cultures, different backgrounds, different outlooks on life that they can risk their lives under what you give them is a very distorted explanation that well, it will go to court and if it goes to court anything about you will be in camera then you still have to say, and I assume that all judges will recognize the sensitivity of revealing your name and identity and therefore having it in camera will keep it secret. It just won't sell.
- Q. Let me just ask one question in this area. President Carter and Vice President Mondale, who was a member of the Church Committee, campaigned on pledges to reform the CIA. And, the President said in his campaign that the CIA had, in fact, been involved in abuses and he wanted the government to change. He now says, in the State of the Union message, that he wants to remove some restrictions from intelligence gathering and to hear him say that and listening to you today, it occurs to me there has been a change in mood in the Administration about this whole area that at one point more openness was what the President seemed to want, now as I listen to you and what he said in the State of the Union, more secrecy is required. Am I wrong about that is that a change?
- A. You're absolutely wrong. What has happened is that we have been successful in establishing the controls that will prevent the abuses that the President spoke against in his campaign. We have proved to ourselves that through the oversight process of an independent intelligence oversight board, of a National Security Council procedure, of two committees of the Congress, of much more scrutiny by you, the media, that we have built a series of assurances and controls that

will give the American people confidence that there will not be abuses in the future. Now, in that atmosphere we can go and relook at the initial reactions to some of the abuses and that was an overly constrained set of controls was put on because there was no oversight process of adequacy at that time. So, the initial reaction was understandable, the Hughes-Ryan Amendment which overdid it can be relaxed to some extent now and we haven't had to remove any of these, we have asked to litigate their worse features. We now can afford to do that because we have proved over a period of four years that we have an effective oversight mechanism to protect the American citizen and his rights.

- Q. Admiral, you made some reference to the fact that this is an area in which the Marquis of Queensbury Rules just don't apply. You know it is sometimes said that newspapering is not a respectable business and those who seek to make it so only pervert it. Do you say the same about (inaudible)?
- A. I wouldn't say the same about newspapers.
- Q. Admiral, do you think the President should personally approve on advance notice, CIA covert operations?
- A. Yes, he does.
- Q. So he should know everything that CIA is doing in countries around the world in advance of doing them?
- A. Yes.
- Q. You said, as I understood it in you initial comments, that you wanted to reduce the number of committees involved on oversight from 8 to 2 and you said that a number of those committees were involved in the intelligence committees. And then you said that it was satisfactory as long as the secrets were "within the committee structure." Does that mean something less than sharing with all the committee members advance notice on covert operations?
- A. What it means to me is that there are 13 to 17 members on the two intelligence committees. There are 2 members of each intelligence committee who are also members of the Appropriations Committee. There are 2 who are also members of the Armed Services and there are 2 who are also members of the Foreign Relations Committee. What we have in mind is that if a Foreign Relations Committee discussion is going

on in the Foreign Relations forum about country x and we're conducting a covert action in country x, there will be 2 members of that committee who can raise their hands and let's go into a closed session because there is information not apparent on the surface here which I have as a result of being a member of the Intelligence Committee, and, therefore, it's germane to this issue. It means that other than those members, the other members would not normally come into contact with these covert actions unless they pour on a debate in that particular committee.

- Q. It specifically would not mean limiting access to the chairman of the committee alone. The Agency would never just go to a committee chairman and consider that that put it within the committee's trust.
- A. No, that's not what we have in mind at all.
- Q. Admiral, I believe that you have disclosed here a reversal of CIA policy that is of importance to every newspaper person in the country. When it was revealed some years ago that the CIA had infiltrated the American press--I'm not using that word pejoratively--the CIA had engaged American journalists to work for the Agency, there was understandable uproar. Journalists throughout the country felt that this endangered not only the ethic of our work, but physical existence of our foreign correspondents. For certain reasons, editors of large newspapers, as well as foreign correspondents, had a large part in that, I felt that way. To put it to question, the real purpose of American foreign correspondents. At that time, one of your predecessors, George Bush, said in response to many queries and much discussion, that the CIA would not use American journalists to engage in its work. He did not, as I recall, exclude the possibility of the use of stringers. But as I do recall, and the Director I think will bear me out on this, Mr. Bush said that he would not engage regular American correspondents. Have you changed that policy? Are you aware of Mr. Bush's comments?
- A. Oh, I'm aware of the regulation which Mr. Bush established.
- Q. Have you changed it?
- A. Yes.
- Q. Has the change been announced?
- A. It was out three years ago.

- Q. When was it announced, sir?
- A. April or May of 1977. The only change I made was to put in the clause that was my personal approval that exceptions could be made. In part, that's because I had registered with me complaints from the media, the clerics and the academics that some ridiculous actions were taking place. We have something called the Foreign Broadcast Information Service, an unclassified activity that all of you I think rely on. We were using some part time clerics as translators for unclassified information. We fired them under these rules. So we now said no, we could have some flexibility.
- Q. But you had told us. You have now told us
- A. Over three years ago.
- Q. That I don't think it quite sunk into the American press that the Director of CIA now feels that it is his right to use American journalists stationed abroad when deems it necessary.
- A. Well, I've not tried to hide that (inaudible)
- Q. Was that something approved by the President?
- A. I testified in public before the Aspen Subcommittee and the House Intelligence Committee and there was great publicity on it in the media that this was our procedure.
- Q. Admiral, have you in fact used this discretionary power (inaudible)
- A. On three occasions I have given permission to utilize a journalist for intelligence purposes. It happens that in none of those instances did we ever consummate that action. The circumstances just didn't materialize in the right way. I have reported to the Aspen Subcommittee, to the House Intelligence Committee the exact circumstances and the reasons for that and about ten days ago, Chairman Boland of that committee send me a letter, published it openly, saying that he had reviewed those three exceptions and he considered them perfectly reasonable.
- Q. I'd like to ask you a subjective question now.

- A. I think this is the way in which the system should operate. It should not iron clad by a wall, by an inflexible rule. I should have authority to make exceptions when it is reasonable and in the national interest to do so. But the oversight committees should check on me, and find out whether I'm being capricious or doing this for less than good reason, and then report to you, as Mr. Boland has done. It's a perfect demonstration of how the system should work so as not to tie this country into knots.
- Q. Admiral, I'd like to ask a subjective question. Do you think it is worthwhile for the purpose that you are able to make a decision three times and not to pass into doubt, the ethical and professional position of every foreign correspondent now abroad. In other words, how is the government acting as host to an American correspondent to know whether that person has been one of your exceptions, particularly in danger areas?
- A. I think that we're naive if we think every foreign correspondent around the world from other countries is free of intelligence association. I think we're naive if we think a regulation that I would issue Congress would pass is the best and proper way to protect your ethics. I'd be shamed if I were to have to have a law to protect my ethics. You could be suborned by the military/industrial complex, by business, by so many people in addition to intelligence that surely, to maintain your credentials to the world you need to perform and to be independent, not to have some regulation on the Central Intelligence Agency's books to protect you.
- Q. Admiral, I'd like to ask as the laws governing the CIA, the protection of covert activities that you're worried about really came about because people in high political places that reviewed CIA for other than the purposes that you described this morning, I'd like to ask you if you think the present laws and the present policy that they are working are adequate protection from people in high political places from ever again using CIA for their own purposes?
- A. Yes, I do. I just can't impress on you enough how many hurdles I must go through before a covert action can be effected. And those hurdles include different departments of the Executive Branch who have different outlooks, different interests and the Legislative Branch, and including the possibility that if something were askew,

any one of our employees who are privileged to know about could report it to the Intelligence Oversight Board. In short, I sincerely believe that if there were attempted abuse of the covert action mechanism of our country, there are enough people now informed of it with enough different interests and different power relationships, that it would come to light.

Q. How many covert actions have you been encouraged to undertake by the existing notification ?

A. Several.

Q. Fewer than five?

A. I don't want to get very specific. And it's a very subjective issue. To begin with, at what level in the hierarchy's thinking of covert actions do these things get turned off because people say well, we just couldn't possibly do that if we're going to notify that many people, it may endanger peoples' lives or it will blow too quickly, so they may be many more that I never heard of and never came to me. But, only a relatively few, but some significant ones.

Q. Admiral, do you have "criminal sanctions" for anyone who reveals the name of a covert agent. Senator Moynihan takes an opposite view saying that would possibly interfere with legitimate coverage of your Agency, and a Justice Department official has testified that it would be unconstitutional. , of that proposal, and if so, can you give us some of your views on the constitutional implications of that?

A. The Justice Department does agree with (inaudible) and it is a very limited authority, not nearly as broad as what you are saying. It is an authority to prosecute when there is a deliberate revelation of what was known to be classified information on individuals who work in the intelligence field and whose identity was deliberately attempted to be concealed by the government. So there are very tight limitations on this. A newspaper reporter who published one of our people's name not knowing what this was about would have no problem.

Q. And therefore, the act of classification itself would bring automatic criminal sanctions if that were true; by simply classifying the information whether it was justified or not would lead to criminal sanctions if it were published.

A. Well, if the individual knew that it was classified and deliberately wanted to expose it with intent to harm (inaudible) that's the other proviso.

Q. I share Abe's I've learned that we have slipped back from the position American correspondents with the assumption that they could not be CIA paid. The point where now your power of exception will be declared jeopardizes all, but let me ask a further question. In stating your policy that journalists would not be utilized by the CIA without your express review, were you referring the journalists reporting for American publications only or for journalists of all countries?

A. I'm only talking about our relationships with journalists associated with American media organizations.

Q. We recognize, Admiral, that

A. I'd be happy to work with a Pravda correspondent if he'd like to be my agent.

Q. That's the point. I would like to address a question to you. We recognize, perhaps more than anyone, that freedom and freedom of the press varies (inaudible). We in America stand for freedom, but really have very little except the power of our example to go up with our flag unfurled. The freedom of the press we recommend to all nations independent from government, independent from employment by their spy networks that these things occur. But what about this power of American example? Would it not be well if you extended your policy statement covering American journalists to cover journalists of all nations?

A. I'm really impressed by an explicit assumption in all of these conversations. What you're saying, I believe, is that if you accept an assignment from me to get some information that may be very vital to our country, you've lost your freedom. And I don't understand that. I really don't. You're sort of saying that if you accept a request to serve your country, maybe for money, maybe not, that you're no longer free, that you're going to be doing something that's against your profession. Now, if you slant the news because you are on our payroll, that's

bad. You aren't free, but it's your choice whether a relationship with us, reporting information to us can somehow profane your work. And you must have relationships with all kinds of other organizations besides ours and, hopefully, you're maintaining your freedom there. So, I'm sorry, I don't understand the